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THE ROUND TABLE

AT THE SIGN OF THE QUILL

A great deal has been said of the subnormal child and many plans have been made for his welfare. Not so much care has been given to an equally needy student, the intellectual aristocrat of our high schools.

Feeling this need, I devised an intra-class activity for the better students in my composition classes. I extended an invitation of membership in an authors' club wherein they might find for their talent scope otherwise denied them by mere assigned exercise, however varied such might be.

I prepared a large bulletin. In the upper center was a cover from a local real-estate advertising sheet bearing two oaks and the legend, "Will you be an oak or a mushroom?" On this was typed a quotation from a former student, "To work is great fun, to accomplish something is greater fun, but to create something is the greatest fun of all." The lower center was occupied by a *Vogue* cover showing a lady writing. The design, entirely of ovals, created in the beholder a desire to seize the pen. Between these two posters was the invitation showing the advantages, pleasures, and future good coming from membership in the club. At the sides of the bulletin were lists of regulations, inducements, possible compositional activities, and methods of publication.

The result was overwhelming. Thirty students applied for membership.

Of the applicants those of decided talent were entered unconditionally. The rest were required to write an entrance test with the understanding that if all were not well at any time their names would be dropped from the roll. A few of these eliminations were made, but at the beginning of the second semester new members were entered so that at the close of the year the membership still numbered thirty.

The honorary members were but three in number: the superintendent, a writer of clear-cut, simple, effective style; a former "teacher of the teacher" who had published in the magazines, and the instructor of Sophomore English, who is on the road to authorship. The associate members were former students who had left noteworthy works behind them.

The compositional activities used were short stories, plays, poems, essays (personal, critical, nature), sketches, reviews, legends, stories for children, pen pictures, musical interpretations. The work was done in groups within the classes or made up of members of different classes. Many of course worked alone, and some did much more than was required, *without credit*.

Interest is increased by prospect of publication and by models by the honorary members with whom they are acquainted, by one of my college professors about whom I often speak, and by a series of poems and essays of my own published by one of the local papers. Only the best are published, but all worth while are typed, bound in volumes, and deposited in the club room and in the public library. The volumes are bound in blue covers embossed with the club's monogram in silver. This monogram was chosen from a number submitted by members of the class in fine arts.

The club has been of use to the community. One group, led by a girl whose great-grandmother attended a ball at which Julien Dubuque, founder of the city, was present, gathered some biographical material on Dubuque pioneers for a biographer in a neighboring city. Much of the literary material for the school monthly was secured from club members. Needless to say, this raised the standard of the paper, for which many of our exchanges complimented us.

Dubuque is exceeding rich in nature lore. The club hopes to arouse a just pride and interest in this, and to this end is collecting and compiling local data into card catalogues for the public library. This will be of especial aid to the children of the elementary schools, who love their work and flock there for supplementary material. Thus far we have confined our data to birds and flowers, having identified some ninety species of birds migrant and resident, and four hundred species of wild flowers.

Play-writing was one of the most satisfactory ventures. Three were used by the principal of one of the elementary schools, one by the Endeavor Society of one of the churches. These were one-act plays. One entire group, roused to emulation by the success of the others, decided to devote a semester to that activity. Since it was the year of the Plymouth Tercentenary, we began by studying history. Then we turned our attention to the drama and dramatic method, the public library putting all its material at our disposal. We made one-act plays, discussed these and found our mistakes, and then began on three-act plays. Two of these were of such merit as to be sent to the dramatic

department at Iowa University which holds such plays in readiness for demand from the high schools of the state. One of these, *Even unto Plymouth Comes Ostentation*, is a symbolic play with double stage, poetic in thought and diction. The other, *The Promise: A Character Play*, is a worldly thing of real dramatic merit.

LINDA RIDER

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SHAKESPEARE AND ZANE GRAY

The following theme was handed me by a Freshman the other week. It was so frankly outspoken that I later read it to a section of twenty-two Freshmen. I asked each man to write his individual opinion as soon as I had finished reading. Of the twenty-two, twenty agreed with the point of view of the theme. One man thought Zane Gray inferior to Shakespeare because he believed that a great piece of writing should contain something in addition to a series of breathless moments. The other man was not sure just what he did believe; he was acquainted with neither author.

Each of the men was from an accredited high school. One was from California; one, from Colorado; two, from Missouri; one, from Illinois; one, from Ohio; one from Mississippi. The others were from Iowa. The man who thought of the breathless moments was from Iowa. One man, while in high school, had taken a course in the writing of the short-story; another, a course in versification.

During the past ten years I have frequently tried similar experiments. Usually the result is the same. I have often wondered who has impressed the boys with the idea that Shakespeare is immoral and that he is merely an obsolete stylist of a forgotten age. This is less strange, perhaps, than that the boys should still think when they come to college that Wright and Gray are true interpreters of life.

The theme follows:

THE KIND OF WRITING I LIKE BEST

I prefer American novels to any other form of literature. This is not unusual for a boy of my age, indeed it is the usual thing. I shall endeavor to write a brief discussion of the various types of writing, and to show, if possible, why I like the American novel. I will start with a brief discussion on Shakespeare.

I enjoy Shakespeare after a fashion. I can read Macbeth or the Comedy of Errors and enjoy both of them. I have studied Macbeth in High School English and am fairly familiar with it. In the same course I have studied Midsummer Night's Dream. The former I studied because it was required.